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Contesting the ‘War on Drugs’ in the Andes: US–Bolivian Relations of Power and Control (1989–93)

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Abstract

The implementation of President George H. W. Bush’s 1989 Andean Initiative brought to the fore competing US and Bolivian agendas. While US embassy officials sought to exert control in pursuit of militarised policies, the Bolivian government’s ambivalence towards the coca-cocaine economy underpinned opposition to the ‘Colombianisation’ of the country. This article deconstructs prevailing top-down, US-centric analyses of the drug war in Latin America to examine how US power was exercised and resisted in the Bolivian case. Advancing a more historically grounded understanding of the development of the US drug war in Latin America, it reveals the fluidity of US–Bolivian power relations, the contested nature of counter-drug policy at the country level, and the instrumentalisation of the ‘war on drugs’ in distinct US and Bolivian agendas.

Keywords: ‘War on Drugs’; illicit drug economy; coca; US role in Latin America; North–South power relations

Introduction

The reason we were down there to begin with was because of the massive flow of cocaine into the United States, which was killing our kids.¹

The ‘war on drugs’, like the Cold War, was used to justify everything.²

The implementation of President George H. W. Bush’s 1989 Andean Initiative brought to the fore competing US and Bolivian agendas: US embassy officials sought to exert control over the Bolivian government and security forces in pursuit of counter-drug goals, while local ambivalence towards the coca-cocaine economy, and the prioritisation of political, social and economic stability, resulted in opposition to US drug war policies and the perceived ‘Colombianisation’ of Bolivia. Distinct US and Bolivian narrative tropes supported this dynamic: for the former, US exceptionalism and securitised conceptions of drugs;³ for the latter, the ‘democracy generation’, ‘Yankee Imperialism’ and the legacy of the Cold War. This article elucidates these narratives and traces the contested nature of counter-drug policy at the country level. In so doing, it deconstructs top-down, US-centric analyses of the drug war in Latin America to examine how US power was exercised and resisted in the Bolivian case. Such top-down analyses underplay the ‘messiness’ of policy implementation, and thus fail to acknowledge fully how policy is negotiated by different actors with different objectives.⁴ The article considers interactive effects between the ‘messy’ local context and the conduct of the ‘war on drugs’ to challenge broad assumptions around US–Bolivian power asymmetries.

¹ Interview with Charles R. Bowers, US ambassador to Bolivia (1991–4), 12 April 2013.

² Interview with Jaime Paz Zamora, president of Bolivia (1989–93), 26 April 2014.

³ Securitisation refers to a process through which specific issues are transformed into matters of ‘security’. This transformation typically occurs through public discourse: relevant audiences are convinced of the ‘existential threat’ posed by the issue. In the case of the ‘war on drugs’, key US state actors viewed the issue of drug use and the drug trade through the lens of security, rather than through those of public health or development, for example. For more on securitisation, see Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

⁴ David Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand: How Opium Undermined Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2016), p. 5.

The analysis focuses on interactions between elite political actors, drawing on 27 oral history accounts gathered during fieldwork in the United States and Bolivia over 2013 and 2014.⁵ Interviewees include US government officials with direct and indirect experience of counter-supply efforts in the Andes in the 1980s and 1990s, some of whom had been based in the US embassy in La Paz; and Bolivian officials and politicians from around the time of the Jaime Paz Zamora government (1989–93). I gained access to these individuals through a variety of means, for example: contact through third parties, such as the American Foreign Service Association or journalists, and ‘snowballing’ from early interviews. During the process of gaining informed consent, all participants were offered options around anonymity and the use of direct quotes.⁶ Many chose to speak on the record, and appeared frank in their views. While some speculation is necessary here, it seemed that the historic nature of the topic underpinned their willingness to provide relatively open accounts.⁷ These actors played pivotal roles in determining the course of counter-drug policy in Bolivia, as well as in the wider political life of the country. The juxtaposition of their accounts exposes the competing priorities of the period, and the tensions between international and domestic political pressures that shaped the construction of policy at the country level. Documentary and secondary sources support interview data to provide granular analysis of US and Bolivian agendas; the narratives, motives and constraints that underpinned them; and the strategies pursued by different actors.

⁵ See Annex A for a full list of interviewees.

⁶ In line with research institutional ethical approval (College of Arts, University of Glasgow), I provided participants with a written summary of the research and its aims, how their data would be used, and options around anonymity/direct quotes. Before each interview, I allowed time for questions and gave participants my contact details. Some requested the opportunity to sign off on the use of direct quotes. In these cases, participants were duly contacted. All approved the use of quotes.

⁷ Most participants were semi-retired and hence felt that there was little to lose in speaking to me. Many seemed to enjoy the opportunity to reflect on the past and explore their role in the period. Perhaps they also saw me as a keeper of the historic record and wished to advance their perspective. For more on this latter theme, see: Antonius C. G. M. Robben, ‘The Politics of Truth and Emotion among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence’, in Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds.), *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 97.

This analysis reveals not only contestation during the policy implementation process and its links to historic political factors, but the instrumentalisation of the ‘war on drugs’ in US–Bolivian relations of power and control. Power relations between the US embassy and the Bolivian government were fluid, as each side pursued its agenda. As well as drawing on US geopolitical and economic power, the embassy employed ‘on-the-ground’ tactics to exert control. Accusations of corruption were used by the embassy to leverage the Bolivian government, while ‘drug war proxies’ – local counter-drug units funded and largely directed by the United States – allowed for the bypassing of ‘uncooperative’ elements of the Bolivian state. Within the Bolivian government, such actions were held as emblematic of US ‘imperialistic’ strategies in South America, with the drug war supposedly used to silence leftist opponents. Here, the narratives and dynamics of the Cold War still had major influence. Bolivian actors responded with their own strategies of resistance. Most notably, the Repentance Decree, discussed below – giving reduced sentences for traffickers who turned themselves in, and thereby representing a less confrontational, Bolivian, ‘solution’ to the issue – stood in contrast to US securitised conceptions of the ‘drug problem’. In such ways, the ‘war on drugs’ was interwoven with local political concerns and historic trends of US–Bolivian relations.

Top-down, US-Centric Analyses of the ‘War on Drugs’ in Latin America

Much of the literature on the US ‘war on drugs’ in Latin America assumes particular North–South power asymmetries.⁸ While it is certainly the case that the United States has been the primary driving force of international counter-drug efforts in Latin America over the past 40 years,⁹ top-down, US-centric analyses often understate country-level dynamics,

⁸ For example: Bruce M. Bagley and Jonathan D. Rosen (eds.), *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2015); Suzanna Reiss, *We Sell Drugs: The Alchemy of US Empire* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Coletta Youngers and Eileen Rosin (eds.), *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of US Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 2005).

⁹ Latin American leaders, past and present, have more recently advocated for a change of tack, presenting a distinct Latin American vision for counter-drug responses. For example, the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy included former-presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, César Gaviria of Colombia and Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico. The commission came together in 2008 to evaluate the impacts of the ‘war on drugs’ in the region and explore alternatives.

i.e. the interactions between actors with distinct agendas that affect policy implementation. Examination of these interactions provides insights into how US power was actually exercised and, at times, resisted by local governmental actors. This section thus deconstructs top-down analyses of the US drug war in Latin America. These analyses are important to the Bolivian case: US power ensured the export of the Andean Initiative; and drug war narratives shaped country-level dynamics. However, their underlying assumptions are insufficient to account for the fluidity of power relations.

Extending the US Drug War to the South

The extension of the US drug war to Latin America is built on domestic and international premises. Domestically, Francisco Thoumi argues that the moralistic ‘perceptions, principles and prejudices’ of the US cultural views of drugs have had persistent and enduring influence on US drug policy.¹⁰ Drugs are viewed as tearing at the fabric of mainstream US society, as evident in periodic domestic drug scares and the demarcation – and demonisation – of ethnic minorities and fringe groups in the United States.¹¹ The drug ‘threat’ necessitates hard-line responses, representing a belief that ‘drug evils will be “wiped out” or at least fundamentally contained’¹² through stringent enforcement measures.¹³ This ‘threat’, in turn, underpins the impulse to pursue counter-supply efforts abroad. For example, as the ‘crack-cocaine epidemic’ came to dominate the US political agenda in the 1980s, attention turned towards the source in Latin America. Presidential administrations of the period asserted that the United States would fight a ‘war on drugs’ in the Andes to stem the flow of drugs from the South and protect US society. Echoing the

¹⁰ Francisco E. Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 27.

¹¹ For example: Kathleen J. Frydl, *The Drug Wars in America, 1940–1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine (eds.), *Crack in America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

¹² Paul Gootenberg, ‘Talking about the Flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control’, *Cultural Critique*, 71 (Winter 2009), p. 37.

¹³ Reflecting its post-WWII hegemony, the United States successfully transposed this prohibitionist model onto the international drug control regime. See David Bewley-Taylor, *The United States and International Drug Control, 1909–1997* (London: Continuum, 1999).

moralistic dichotomies of domestic narratives, the evils of drug trafficking would be defeated by prohibitionist policies.¹⁴

International premises of the US drug war in Latin America, meanwhile, were rooted in the advancement of post-Cold War securitisation. A range of non-traditional security threats was identified during this period, as the United States and its Western allies sought to extend order to the ‘ungoverned spaces’ of the world.¹⁵ The cocaine economy was seen as a threat to regional and global security, incorporating the destabilising effects of powerful and violent drug trafficking empires in ‘America’s backyard’, and the use of drug revenues by armed actors, i.e. supposed ‘narco-guerrillas’ or ‘narco-terrorists’.¹⁶ Within this policy discourse, defeat of the drug trade was a necessary first step to establishing security and the conditions for political and socio-economic development. The moralistic mission of eliminating drugs was thus aligned with other stated US foreign policy goals in Latin America. US political actors have argued that counter-drug policies are beneficial to source and transit nations, securing peace, stability and free-market democracies.¹⁷ Latin American governments which challenged this model were subject to US sanctions for failing to fulfil international drug control obligations and their motives called into question, with suspicions raised of complicity or permissiveness towards the drug trade. The US government used this narrative to justify the extension of its drug war border to the South:¹⁸

¹⁴ Russell C. Crandall, ‘Explicit Narcotization: US Policy towards Colombia during the Samper Administration’, *Latin American Politics and Society*, 43: 2 (2001), p. 100.

¹⁵ Patrick Meehan, ‘Fortifying or Fragmenting the State? The Political Economy of the Opium/Heroin Trade in Shan State, Myanmar, 1988–2013’, *Critical Asian Studies*, 47: 2 (2015), p. 259.

¹⁶ For example: Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *National Drug Control Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990).

¹⁷ Brian Loveman, ‘US Security Policies in Latin America and the Andean Region, 1990–2006’, in Brian Loveman (ed.), *Addicted to Failure: US Security Policy in Latin America and the Andean Region* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 1–52.

¹⁸ Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, 2003), p. 443.

expanding US counter-drug presence and militarised policies abroad, fortifying foreign state security forces and eradicating drug crops.

The literature has generally been critical of this drug war approach, highlighting the structural causes of the illicit economy in Latin America and the harmful effects of counter-drug policies.¹⁹ Marginalised rural communities, for example, turn to coca cultivation due to poverty rather than greed or moral failure,²⁰ while weak state institutions are vulnerable to powerful drug trafficking organisations.²¹ Well-funded, high-level organised crime has wreaked corruption and violence across the region. Drug war policies, though, have intensified and escalated such problems.²² Market-disruptive policy interventions, for example, have stimulated violent competition between rival traffickers, heightening insecurity.²³ Human rights abuses carried out by militarised counter-drug units may be cited here, alongside damage to precarious livelihoods through forced eradication of drug crops.²⁴ These perspectives emphasise Latin American victimhood, as a site both of the international cocaine trade and US drug war fervour.

¹⁹ For example: Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds.), *Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010).

²⁰ Eric Gutierrez (ed.), 'Drugs and Illicit Practices: Assessing their Impact on Development and Governance', Christian Aid Occasional Paper, Oct. 2015.

²¹ Jonathan D. Rosen and Hanna S. Kassab, 'Introduction: Fragile States in the Americas', in Jonathan D. Rosen and Hanna S. Kassab (eds.), *Fragile States in the Americas* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2017), pp. xii–xiii.

²² For example: Lamond Tullis, *Unintended Consequences: Illegal Drugs and Drug Policies in Nine Countries (Studies on the Impact of the Illegal Drug Trade)* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 1995).

²³ Juan Camilo Castillo, Daniel Mejía and Pascual Restrepo, 'Scarcity without Leviathan: The Violent Effects of Cocaine Supply Shortages in the Mexican Drug War', Center for Global Development Working Paper 356, Feb. 2014, available at http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/scarcity-leviathan-effects-cocaine-supply-shortages_1.pdf (last access 16 Jan. 2019).

²⁴ For example: Youngers and Rosin (eds.), *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*.

According to this critique, the extension of the ‘war on drugs’ represents not benevolent US foreign policy intentions, but rather the prioritisation of US goals over local concerns. Counter-drug policies have been formulated – or ‘implicitly vetoed’ – in Washington with little meaningful input from host governments.²⁵ Unilateral US threats of sanction, including ‘decertification’,²⁶ have forced Latin American governments into compliance with drug policies. US geopolitical and economic power has marginalised legitimate concerns over the localised effects of drug war policies. Furthermore, the exercise of US power in this domain has at times been arbitrary and overtly political.²⁷ Opaque metrics of progress have been deployed; US allies spared punishment, while opponents of US policy were censured. In this sense, the ‘war on drugs’ has served traditional US hemispheric goals of establishing power and influence throughout Latin America.²⁸

Contesting the ‘War on Drugs’

These top-down analyses provide numerous insights into the US drug war in Latin America. At the country level, though, the broad assumption of North–South power asymmetry limits our understanding of how the ‘war on drugs’ has actually been implemented. On the US side, actors based in embassies throughout the region have enjoyed significant autonomy when navigating complex local contexts. To forward counter-drug goals, these actors have negotiated with host government counterparts, as well as weighing wider foreign policy objectives and the interests of other US agencies. Local political actors must also navigate these contexts, and balance myriad domestic pressures

²⁵ Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes*, p. 309.

²⁶ US Congress established the process of ‘certification’ as part of the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act. This act obligated the president to report to Congress on the performance of partner governments in the area of counter-drug policy. Partner governments deemed to have failed in their drug control obligations would be ‘decertified’, which potentially entailed a range of economic sanctions. William L. Marcy, *The Politics of Cocaine: How US Foreign Policy Created a Thriving Drug Industry in Central and South America* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, 2010), pp. 87–8.

²⁷ Julia Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics* (London: Zed Books, 2006), p. 140.

²⁸ For example: Elizabeth Joyce, ‘Packaging Drugs: Certification and the Acquisition of Leverage’, in Victor Bulmer-Thomas and James Dunkerley (eds.), *The United States and Latin America: The New Agenda* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 207–26.

against the demands of the United States. Studying the interaction of these differing agendas reveals the reality of power relations in Latin America, and their implications for the ‘war on drugs’. Aside from US geopolitical and economic influence, how has US power been exercised by actors at the country level? How have local political actors responded to US power and pursued distinct priorities?

Answering such questions requires a move beyond ‘drug fetishism’. This refers to a tendency within the literature to view the ‘war on drugs’ narrowly through the lens of policy objectives: focusing on ‘the efficacy of specific counter-narcotics interventions and institutions’.²⁹ Coca eradication in one location, for example, has been linked to rises in cultivation in other areas – the ‘balloon effect’.³⁰ This is viewed as a simple economic mechanism of supply and demand, but such analysis relegates the livelihood strategies and agency of rural communities to the margins. It downgrades the political effects of changing patterns of cultivation, as different actors gain and lose from eradication policies.³¹ In the Bolivian case, coca unions adopted radical tactics of protest to protect their livelihoods and resist the incursion of US-backed eradication, affecting the terms of counter-drug policy debates and changing the calculations of high-level political actors.³² Counter-drug policies are applied within such multi-faceted social, political and economic settings, interwoven with the drug trade and its direct and indirect interests.

This critique draws on David Mansfield’s analysis of opium-poppy bans in Afghanistan, where – he argues – drug control interventions are mistakenly seen as ‘discrete and bounded’; and the actions of different actors are viewed exclusively against drug control

²⁹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 5.

³⁰ Stella M. Rouse and Moises Arce, ‘The Drug-Laden Balloon: US Military Assistance and Coca Production in the Central Andes’, *Social Science Quarterly*, 87: 3 (2006), pp. 540–57.

³¹ Richard Snyder, ‘Does Lutable Wealth Breed Disorder? A Political Economy of Extraction Framework’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 39: 8 (2006), p. 951.

³² Thomas Grisaffi, ‘From the Grassroots to the Presidential Palace: Evo Morales and the Coca Growers’ Union in Bolivia’, in Sian Lazar (ed.), *Where Are the Unions? Workers and Social Movements in Latin America, the Middle East and Europe* (London: Zed Books, 2017), pp. 44–63.

objectives, as either inhibiting or advancing these goals.³³ This restrictive focus, therefore, fails to adequately account for wider political dynamics: how counter-drug efforts are weighed against – and subsumed into – other agendas. While grassroots actors such as *cocaleros* (coca leaf growers) and social movements undoubtedly shape these agendas, this article focuses on interactions between high-level US and Bolivian political actors. It builds on James Siekmeier's history of US–Bolivian relations, which challenges the underlying assumptions of Bolivian dependency to examine the active role Bolivian actors played in shaping US actions.³⁴ Active roles were played by officials of the Paz Zamora government, as they sought to manage relations with 'drug warriors' in the US embassy and pursued distinct aims.

As part of this analytical focus, it is important to consider the utilisation of drug war narratives in relations between these actors. The 'war on drugs' has provided a logic of action for US and local actors in Latin America: US actors linked it to foreign policy goals of security, democracy and development, while political actors, from a defensive position, drew on its conceptual framework to argue that it was an imperialist project of the United States, and that resistance to US influence was a noble fight for security and democracy. Local political actors also claimed legitimacy through their own counter-drug efforts. These incongruous narratives are indicative of the rhetorical malleability of the 'war on drugs'. The 'war on drugs' may be thought of less as 'a specific guideline or articulated vision', but rather as 'multiple narratives' used to 'justify political action' and 'knit together' diverse priorities.³⁵ Recognising these multiple narratives again moves away from 'drug fetishism', which tends to view counter-drug implementation as 'more coherent, concerted and coordinated' than is 'often seen in practice'.³⁶ Instead, this article examines how such narratives were instrumentalised in relations of power and control between actors with diverse and, at times, competing goals.

³³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 47.

³⁴ James Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1952 to the Present* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011).

³⁵ Winifred Tate, *Drugs, Thugs and Diplomats: US Policymaking in Colombia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 4.

³⁶ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 6.

Background: Introduction of the Andean Initiative

As the Cold War drew to an end and public panic spread over the supposed ‘crack epidemic’ in the United States, George H. W. Bush made the ‘war on drugs’ a cornerstone of his presidency (1989–93). The Andean Initiative formed a crucial part of his administration’s response to the claimed national crisis. Emboldened by post-Cold War euphoria, the 1989 US\$2.2 billion counter-drug aid package signalled the US government’s intent to defeat the cocaine supply at source.³⁷ During this period, Colombia was the epicentre of the trade, with trafficking dominated by international criminal organisations based out of Medellín and Cali. Peruvian coca was estimated to constitute roughly two-thirds of the total market, while Bolivia accounted for around a quarter of net coca cultivation over the late 1980s.³⁸ The Andean Initiative sought to target the trade at each of these points in the coca-cocaine commodity chain.

The three pillars of the strategy established the foundations for the modern-era of the US ‘war on drugs’ in Latin America:³⁹ eradication, interdiction and alternative development. The policy also sponsored a greater counter-drug role for the US Department of Defense’s Southern Command (Southcom) and their military partners in the South. The perceived unilateral militarisation of counter-drug efforts, though, was poorly received in the Andes, and so President Bush met with the governments of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru to ease concerns and ‘multi-lateralise’ the issue at the first Andean drug summit in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia).⁴⁰ The governments of the region argued for increased emphasis on

³⁷ Interview with David Miller, National Security Council (NSC) deputy assistant secretary (1988–92), 3 May 2014.

³⁸ US State Department, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990).

³⁹ Although President Richard Nixon had declared a ‘war on drugs’ in 1971, US counter-drug interventions into Latin America during this period were sporadic as Cold War goals dominated US foreign policy in the region. With the end of the Cold War, the ‘war on drugs’ rose up the political agenda, setting in motion a new era of US counter-drug policy in Latin America.

⁴⁰ William Walker III, ‘The Bush Administration’s Andean Initiative in Historical Perspective’, in Bruce Bagley and William Walker III (eds.), *Drug Trafficking in the Americas* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 1–19.

institution-building and development, winning additional US funding for alternative development, formal recognition of the idea of ‘shared responsibility’, and a free trade agreement with the United States – the Andean Trade Preference Act (APTA).⁴¹ However, using the levers of US power (the promise of aid on one hand, decertification on the other), the Bush administration’s preferences for policy survived largely intact. Concessions gained at Cartagena were conditioned on acceptance of militarised counter-drug efforts and coca eradication targets.

The US government viewed Bolivia as an important test case for its counter-drug approach. While it was strategically less significant than its Andean neighbours, US policymakers nevertheless recognised both its role within the regional trade and its symbolic importance to US counter-drug policy in Latin America.⁴² Furthermore, the size and dynamics of the Bolivian coca-cocaine economy made drug war success seem more attainable.⁴³ Colombia, for example, was subject to widespread violence from powerful trafficking organisations, while its internal conflict was becoming ever more closely entwined with the drug trade. Sendero Luminoso in Peru was waging a violent campaign against the state, funded in part by drug revenues. Such problems were largely absent in Bolivia, as were the attendant complications of applying counter-drug efforts in such contexts.⁴⁴ Historically, though, Bolivia had tended to be a low priority for US foreign policy due to its limited geopolitical and economic importance. As a result, ‘on-the-ground’ US actors enjoyed a degree of autonomy and influence in shaping US policy in Bolivia, within the broad parameters set

⁴¹ NSC, ‘Andean Drug Summit’, NSC discussion paper, 1 Nov. 1989, in: National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, DC (hereafter NSA), ‘War in Colombia: Guerrillas, Drugs and Human Rights in U.S.–Colombia Policy, 1988–2002’, NSA Electronic Briefing Book No. 69.

⁴² Interview with John Carnevale, ONDCP official (1988–2002), 26 April 2013.

⁴³ Kathryn Ledebur, ‘Bolivia: Clear Consequences’, in Youngers and Rosin (eds.), *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, p. 145.

⁴⁴ US Office of the Inspector General (OIG), *Report of Audit: Drug Control Activities in Bolivia*, 2-CI-001 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1991), Appendix A.

out in Washington.⁴⁵ The US embassy in La Paz played a major role in determining what the policy meant in practice.

Former US ambassadors to Bolivia Robert Gelbard (1988–91) and Charles Bowers (1991–4) both noted that counter-drug strategy was subject to oversight mechanisms and hence had to align with the overall US approach. However, policymakers in Washington also recognised the need to adapt the policy to local conditions.⁴⁶ This meant dealing with counterparts in the Bolivian government, balancing the objectives of counter-drug policy with wider US aims within the country, and managing a country team of multiple US agencies with overlapping and, at times, conflicting missions.⁴⁷ How such actors understood and navigated the local context was crucial to the course of the ‘war on drugs’ in Bolivia.

The US Embassy’s Priorities

The differing styles of leadership of Gelbard and Bowers shaped US–Bolivian relations. Gelbard argued that his experiences as a young man in the Peace Corps in Bolivia had given him a deep understanding of the local context, equipping him to take a central role in shaping the US counter-drug approach in the country.⁴⁸ His bullish and outspoken diplomacy, though, frequently caused friction with the Bolivian government. Although Bowers looked to keep a lower profile, he continued with the broad strategy put in place by Gelbard and pushed Bolivian counterparts to adopt it. For example, one of Bowers’ first actions as ambassador was to announce continued US support for the introduction of the Bolivian army into counter-drugs, while accepting that this would occur only following

⁴⁵ This trend was evident from the US reaction to the Bolivian Revolution in 1952. For example, see Kenneth D. Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States: A Limited Partnership* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1999), pp. 106–7.

⁴⁶ Interview with Robert S. Gelbard, US ambassador to Bolivia (1988–91), 13 May 2013.

⁴⁷ For examples of this inter-agency friction, see Jaime Malamud-Goti, *Smoke and Mirrors: The Paradox of the Drug Wars* (Oxford: Westview, 1992).

⁴⁸ Interview with Gelbard.

ratification from the government.⁴⁹ In our interview, he argued that a specifically Bolivian ‘mind-set’ inhibited cooperation, in that local actors would bargain over certain issues rather than following through on terms they had previously agreed.⁵⁰ Differences in policy emphasis between the two ambassadors’ terms, therefore, may be identified; but the central themes of the US approach remained settled.

Drug control formed a triad of stated US foreign policy objectives in Bolivia, alongside democratic consolidation and economic development. As Bowers explains, ‘We had what we called “the three Ds”: democracy, drugs and development. That’s what we were about; what we were trying to do.’⁵¹ The US government argued that these goals were complementary. Hence, solving ‘America’s drug problem’ would also be beneficial to Bolivia. Informed by themes of American exceptionalism, US counter-drug policy was defended in terms of shared interests with the Bolivian people. In a letter to Ambassador Bowers, President Bush clearly asserted this vision.

<ext>As leader of the democracies, our Nation faces an historic opportunity to help shape a freer, more secure, and more prosperous world, in which our ideals and way of life can truly flourish. As President, I intend to advance these objectives around the globe, and I look to you, as my personal representative in Bolivia, as my partner in this task.⁵²

In reality, the ‘war on drugs’ came to dominate the US agenda in Bolivia, at times to the detriment of other strategic goals.⁵³ Former Ambassador David Greenlee (2002–6), who also served as deputy chief of mission to the US embassy from 1987 to 1989, explained that

⁴⁹ Eduardo Gamarra, ‘US–Bolivian Counternarcotics Efforts during the Paz Zamora Administration: 1989–1992’, in Bagley and Walker III (eds.), *Drug Trafficking in the Americas*, p. 238.

⁵⁰ Interview with Bowers.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² George H. W. Bush to Charles R. Bowers, 23 Aug. 1991, personal archive of Charles R. Bowers.

⁵³ Kenneth D. Lehman, ‘A “Medicine of Death”? US Policy and Political Disarray in Bolivia, 1985–2006’, in Loveman (ed.), *Addicted to Failure*, p. 132.

Washington's extensive allocation of resources to counter drugs pulled the US embassy in this direction: 'When people say, "Well, what is it about Bolivia that links back to the States that really touches our interests?" It was, in those days – back in the late '80s particularly – Bolivian cocaine hitting the streets of the US.'⁵⁴ In sum, US politicians were more concerned with fighting a drug war in the Andes than in promoting democracy and meaningful development. This impacted on the priorities of the US embassy in La Paz. The domestic premises of the 'war on drugs' served as justification for US counter-drug objectives in Bolivia.

I mean, the reason we were down there to begin with was because of the massive flow of cocaine into the United States which was killing our kids. Still is. [...] The basic thing is, that product made its way into the United States, so the goal was to stop that product coming in.⁵⁵

Translating this goal into a counter-drug strategy suited to the local context, though, revealed tensions between US objectives, no more so than around the issue of coca eradication.

Coca cultivation was (and remains) a sensitive issue. Coca is interwoven with everyday life in Bolivia: holding cultural significance for indigenous communities, as well as being a widely used consumer product. Coca is also a source of livelihood for many rural families, whether for the local, legal domestic market, or for diversion to the illicit economy. As economic crisis and harsh structural reforms took hold during the 1980s, for example, the coca-cocaine industry acted as a social safety-net for many Bolivians.⁵⁶ Eradicating Bolivia's coca had potentially disastrous socio-economic implications for an already struggling country.

⁵⁴ Interview with David Greenlee, deputy chief of mission to the US embassy in La Paz (1987–9) and US ambassador to Bolivia (2002–6), 26 April 2013.

⁵⁵ Interview with Bowers.

⁵⁶ Catherine M. Conaghan and James M. Malloy, *Unsettling Statecraft: Democracy and Neoliberalism in the Central Andes* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), p. 198.

Coca unions provided strong representation for the sector. They drew on nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, and on powerful narratives of coca as indigenous heritage.⁵⁷ By the 1980s, the *cocalero* movement had fused its traditional Altiplano modes of rural organisation with the more militant tactics of the weakened mining unions.⁵⁸ Frequently, *cocaleros* provided fierce opposition to US-backed counter-drug policies. Efforts by the Víctor Paz Estenssoro administration (1985–9) to eradicate ‘illegal’ coca and send the army into the Chapare region, for example, were met with road-blocks in June 1987. Resultant clashes with the security forces ended with the deaths of 11 coca growers.⁵⁹ The June 1988 Villa Tunari massacre of *cocaleros* and peasants by anti-narcotics police caused public outrage across Bolivia, and galvanised the *cocalero* movement. The coca unions pushed for recognition of their interests, winning significant government concessions. This included, for example, legal recognition of traditional coca growing zones, the prohibition of chemical defoliates in coca eradication operations and a legal obligation for the state to provide alternative development.⁶⁰ Bolivian governments of the period were forced to consider not only the potential socio-economic impact of eradicating coca, but also the activism of the *cocaleros*. The issue of coca was thus linked to Bolivia’s social, political and economic stability.

The US embassy recognised the sensitivity of this issue. Reporting on the fragile political situation to Washington several years before the Villa Tunari massacre, the embassy warned: ‘No, repeat no, Bolivian government has been able to survive against strong and united *campesino* opposition (*campesinos* increasingly view coca cultivation as the main

⁵⁷ Grisaffi, ‘From the Grassroots to the Presidential Palace’, pp. 51–2.

⁵⁸ Harry Sanabria, ‘Consolidating States, Restructuring Economies, and Confronting Workers and Peasants: The Antinomies of Bolivian Neoliberalism’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41: 3 (1999), pp. 548–52.

⁵⁹ Ursula Durand Ochoa, *The Political Empowerment of the Cocaleros of Bolivia and Peru* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 106–8.

⁶⁰ Under pressure from the United States to consolidate the country’s drug laws, President Víctor Paz Estenssoro passed Law 1008 in 1988. For more detail see Kevin Healy, ‘Political Ascent of Bolivia’s Peasant Coca Leaf Producers’, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 33: 1 (1991), pp. 87–121.

escape from abject poverty).’⁶¹ Although the Paz Estenssoro administration had committed Bolivia to an ambitious programme of eradication in exchange for US development assistance,⁶² progress towards targets was slow. The embassy attempted to balance demands from Washington to meet eradication goal against local realities. This meant promoting a strategy which shifted attention away from direct confrontation with the *cocaleros*, while promising reductions in coca cultivation.

<ext>While accepting the necessity of continuing to pursue the traditional priority on eradication, [the embassy’s strategy] argues for greater emphasis on interdiction. The latter appears to have a far more immediate impact on coca by depressing prices (and implicitly cultivation), provokes far less governmental and opposition resistance and ultimately comes closer and faster to objectives.⁶³

The quotation indicates the clash of international and domestic pressures, and the embassy’s attempt to navigate them. Eradication remained a crucial tenet of the overall US drug control strategy. It served as the main indicator of ‘progress’, and politicians in the US Congress were eager to see a return for counter-drug assistance provided to Andean countries. The embassy had to placate such concerns. Indeed, during this period, US officials leveraged economic aid to pressure the Bolivian government to meet its targets.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the embassy – for the reasons given in the quotation above, and because such an approach would encourage uptake of alternative development programmes – also favoured interdiction.

The US embassy’s dealings with Paz Zamora government (1989–93) in pursuing this agenda, though, were harmed by differing conceptualisations of the ‘drug problem’ and low levels of trust. This would lead the embassy to apply its own particular strategies of control.

⁶¹ US embassy La Paz to secretary of state, ‘A Revised and Expanded Anti-Narcotics Strategy: We Need More Interdiction, Military Assistance and USAID-Financed Education’, cable 199, 8 Jan. 1986: in NSA, Narcotics Collection, box 10.

⁶² Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States*, p. 201.

⁶³ US embassy La Paz to secretary of state, ‘International Narcotics Control Report 1986 – Bolivia (INSCR)’, cable 10212, 23 Dec. 1985: in NSA, Narcotics Collection, box 10.

⁶⁴ US General Accounting Office (GAO), *Drug Control: US-Supported Efforts in Colombia and Bolivia: Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: GAO, 1988), p. 49.

US Leverage and Drug War Proxies

US actors expressed frustration over the Bolivian government's refusal to accept the securitised premises of the 'war on drugs'.⁶⁵ President Jaime Paz Zamora instead argued that Bolivia's coca-cocaine economy was primarily a problem of development. In the following cable, for example, Ambassador Robert Gelbard relates his dissatisfaction at the Bolivian government's lukewarm response to the capture of prominent drug trafficker Carmelo 'Meco' Domínguez.

Paz Zamora – along with the bulk of Bolivians – continues to engage in a process of denial regarding virtually any other aspect of the drug problem in Bolivia other [*sic*] than coca cultivation and the sense that it is a problem only of economic development and poverty. This accounts for the extraordinary lack of reaction on the [Bolivian government's] part after the truly impressive success in the operation against the Meco Dominguez organisation, i.e. if they were to acknowledge successes against drug trafficking organisations they would have to acknowledge the existence of a problem.⁶⁶

Diverging conceptualisations of the 'drug problem', supported by distinct narratives, were thus important factors in the competing US and Bolivian agendas of the period. These dynamics were evident, for example, during negotiations for an expanded counter-drug role for the Bolivian army. After sustained US pressure, in May 1990 Paz Zamora signed Annex III of the 1987 US–Bolivian anti-drug agreement, granting the army an ill-defined counter-drug role. The agreement provoked widespread opposition due to fears that 'an invigorated army [might] endanger Bolivia's fragile democratic institutions', causing 'an escalation in human-rights abuses and drug-related corruption' and 'unrest among farmers' that could foster 'an insurgent movement like those in Colombia and Peru'.⁶⁷ The Bolivian army's

⁶⁵ Eduardo Gamarra, 'Fighting Drugs in Bolivia: United State and Bolivian Perceptions at Odds', in Madeline Barbara Léons and Harry Sanabria (eds.), *Coca, Cocaine and the Bolivian Reality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 224.

⁶⁶ US embassy La Paz to secretary of state, 'Continued Bolivian Waffling on Counternarcotics Assistance to the Army', cable 14219, 10 Oct. 1990: in NSA, Narcotics Collection, box 5.

⁶⁷ US OIG, *Report of Audit*, pp. 41–2.

past involvement in the drug trade raised concerns of increased institutional corruption,⁶⁸ while recent memories of the Villa Tunari massacre solidified public opposition to the militarisation of counter-drug operations. A coalition of civil society groups, including the *cocaleros* and the Church, protested against the move, finding support in the Bolivian Congress.⁶⁹ Paz Zamora argued in public that US–Bolivian anti-drug agreement had secured significant economic support for Bolivia, and the military were ‘an inseparable part of the global strategy of alternative development’.⁷⁰ Despite the agreement, though, Paz Zamora stalled on releasing the funds to the army.

Using back channels to Paz Zamora’s right-wing coalition partners Acción Democrática Nacionalista (Nationalist Democratic Action, ADN), Ambassador Gelbard pushed for acceleration of the policy. As reported in US embassy cables,⁷¹ the Bolivian foreign minister, Carlos Iturralde of the ADN, said ‘in a straightforward manner that the “problem” is Paz Zamora, who is still not convinced that there really is a need for interdiction in Bolivia because he is really not convinced of a cocaine manufacturing problem and drug trafficking problem’. Gelbard stated his intention ‘to discuss these issues with the appropriate [Bolivian] officials, including President Paz Zamora, military commanders and other political leaders, particularly including [former US-backed dictator and ADN leader] General Banzer’; making it clear that Paz Zamora’s ‘mismanagement of many important issues’ and ‘lack of clear leadership and decision-making ability’ risked losing US economic assistance.

Paz Zamora would eventually bow to this pressure in March 1991, and deploy the army in counter-drug operations. The deployment, though, proved to be short-lived. Societal protests, legal limits on the army’s role in the Chapare and historic rivalries with the police rendered the new anti-drug units ineffective. It was agreed on all sides that the policy

⁶⁸ Allan Gillies, ‘Theorising State–Narco Relations in Bolivia’s Nascent Democracy (1982–1993): Governance, Order and Political Transition’, *Third World Quarterly*, 39: 4 (2018), pp. 731–6.

⁶⁹ Malamud-Goti, *Smoke and Mirrors*, pp. 73–4.

⁷⁰ Gamarra, ‘US–Bolivian Counternarcotics’, p. 228.

⁷¹ US Embassy La Paz to Secretary of State, ‘Continued Bolivian Waffling on Counternarcotics Assistance to the Army’.

should be rolled back.⁷² However, the episode demonstrated the willingness of US officials to circumvent opponents in the Bolivian government and deal with (old) ideological allies, to secure compliance with drug war policy.

US mistrust of the Paz Zamora administration, though, went deeper than a divergence of opinion over the nature of the drug problem. US actors believed official complicity in the drug trade underpinned opposition to drug control policies, viewing corruption ‘as the largest, single problem affecting US narcotics control efforts’.⁷³ A US government report noted that the ‘political will’ of the Bolivian government was ‘questionable, as demonstrated by some recent appointments of corrupt officials to key drug control positions’.⁷⁴ Gelbard stated ‘we were dealing with a corrupt government’,⁷⁵ while former Ambassador Bowers claimed ‘there were a number of people who were not totally on board, [...] in fact, they were corrupt, [...] filling their pockets, [...] bought off by the narco-traffickers’.⁷⁶

The US embassy thus saw the Paz Zamora government as an unreliable ally, and sought to target its ‘corrupt’ elements to assert control. For example, James C. Cason, the political counsellor at the La Paz embassy (1987–90), constructed ‘family trees’ of Bolivia’s drug trafficking organisations through a system of intelligence gathering that trawled public registries, electoral rolls, business records and media reports.⁷⁷ This database was used to vet state officials and politicians.

⁷² James Painter, *Bolivia and Coca: A Study in Dependency* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 99.

⁷³ US OIG, *Report of Audit*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Interview with Gelbard.

⁷⁶ Bowers (in his interview) argued that cultural differences were important in this regard: ‘the Anglo-Saxon, American view of what is appropriate, and what is moral, and what is ethical – inherited from our UK brethren – does not fit totally with what that view might be in Latin America’.

⁷⁷ Oral history of James C. Cason, political counsellor, US embassy La Paz (1987–90) (interviewed 13 Nov. 2009): in The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training – Foreign

<ext>We managed to get a number of interior ministers[,] police chiefs [and] other people fired and jailed using, in part, this kind of data [...] When Jaime Paz Zamora became President we told him not to appoint certain corrupt police as Chief. Don't put the police chiefs in these cities because they're narco traffickers. And we showed them the information and they took our suggestion. And when they did put people in who turned out to be corrupt, with narco ties, we provided information to them about what they were doing and the President fired them.⁷⁸

From the US perspective, this system allowed for the removal of officials who represented a threat to counter-drug goals. Intervening in the internal politics of Bolivia and making definitive judgements on the presumed criminality of certain actors was justified according to drug war narratives: addressing the security threat of drugs and establishing the conditions for democracy.

The embassy's use of drug war proxies – 'vicarious surrogates' of the 'war on drugs'⁷⁹ – formed another part of its control strategy. The establishment and close monitoring of specialist anti-drug police and military units constituted an attempt to bypass 'corrupt' officials and exert US control on foreign soil. The Fuerza Especial de Lucha contra el Narcotráfico (Anti-Narcotics Special Task Force, FELCN), for example, was dependent on the US embassy for its resources and intelligence.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Unidades Móviles de Patrullaje Rural (Mobile Rural Patrol Units, UMOPAR) were funded and subject to oversight mechanisms from the US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, trained by Southcom special forces in paramilitary tactics, and directed in

Affairs Oral History Project, Bolivia Reader, available at <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Bolivia.pdf> (last access 17 Jan. 2019).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 63.

⁷⁹ Ethan A. Nadelmann, *Cops across Borders: The Internationalization of US Criminal Law Enforcement* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 204.

⁸⁰ Juan Ramón Quintana, 'Bolivia: Militares y policías. Fuego cruzado en democracia', in Raynald Belay *et al.* (eds.), *Memorias en Conflicto: Aspectos de la Violencia Política Contemporánea* (Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Andines, 2004), para. 117.

operations by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).⁸¹ Close working relationships between the DEA and local commanders allowed the United States to circumvent more senior officials, with presumed ‘conflicts’.⁸² US geopolitical and economic power in forming these units was thus translated into US presence and power on the ground in Bolivia.

This dynamic provoked complaints that Bolivian sovereignty had been compromised by unfettered US operations. Former President Jaime Paz Zamora claimed that ‘the US embassy had their own people in the Bolivian police and the army; their own people. We had problems with the US when we did things without their people.’⁸³ Bolivian actors sought to resist these modes of US control, arguing that drug war goals had been prioritised over local concerns of political, social and economic stability.

The Bolivian Government Agenda

During his electoral campaign in 1989, Paz Zamora had emphasised his anti-drug war credentials. He looked to seize on public unrest over US-backed counter-drug efforts on Bolivian soil, from the Villa Tunari massacre to the joint military raids of Operation Blast Furnace in 1986.⁸⁴ Paz Zamora drew on a Bolivian tradition of ‘coca nationalism’ that plays into domestic politics, binding the ‘sacred leaf’ to national identity and seeking to reclaim its cultural heritage.⁸⁵ He wore a coca leaf pin in his lapel on the campaign trail,⁸⁶ promising that his Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Leftist Revolutionary

⁸¹ Jacqueline Williams, ‘Waging the War on Drugs in Bolivia’, Washington Office on Latin America Background Paper, 28 Feb 1997, p. 26.

⁸² Interview with Terry Burke, deputy administrator and acting administrator of the DEA (1989–91), 23 April 2013.

⁸³ Interview with Paz Zamora.

⁸⁴ For more information see Malamud-Goti, *Smoke and Mirrors*, pp. 30–2.

⁸⁵ Paul Gootenberg, ‘Cocaine Histories and Diverging Drug War Politics in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru’, *A Contracorriente*, 15: 1 (2017), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States*, p. 133.

Movement, MIR) party would restore national dignity and sovereignty to Bolivia.⁸⁷ Upon taking office, he was critical of the Andean Initiative's militarised focus and argued on the international stage for a shift to a more development-led approach.⁸⁸ While his ADN coalition partners were more closely aligned to the United States, the Bolivian government generally looked to change the narrative around the nation's 'drug problem'. Slogans such as 'coca for development', 'coca is not cocaine'⁸⁹ and 'shared responsibility' played down US securitised conceptions of drugs and defended the reputation of the coca leaf.

These arguments also reflected pragmatic views of Bolivia's coca-cocaine economy. President Paz Estenssoro had implemented deep structural reforms as part of the Nueva Política Económica (New Economic Policy, NPE) in 1985. The government's neoliberal policies brought hyperinflation under control and made Bolivia a poster child of the Washington Consensus.⁹⁰ The three major Bolivian political parties – the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, MNR), ADN and MIR – were convinced of the necessities of continuing down the path of neoliberal reform.⁹¹ However, the social costs of these policies were high: levels of poverty increased, living standards dropped and unemployment soared.⁹² As one of the few booming areas of the economy, the coca-cocaine trade offered a solution for many of those affected. A US government report in 1991 estimated that 350,000 people were directly or indirectly reliant

⁸⁷ Gamarra, 'US-Bolivian Counternarcotics', p. 221.

⁸⁸ Paz Zamora raised these issues when addressing the UN General Assembly in Sept. 1989, for example.

⁸⁹ Interview with Gonzalo Torrico, vice-minister of social defence (1989–93), 2 May 2014.

⁹⁰ The Washington Consensus refers to neoliberal policy reforms – advanced by institutions including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the US Treasury – attached to economic rescue packages for crisis-hit countries in the Global South during the 1980s and 1990s.

⁹¹ Eduardo Gamarra, 'Bolivia: Managing Democracy in the 1990s', in Jorge I. Domínguez and Abraham F. Lowenthal, *Constructing Democratic Governance: South America in the 1990s* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 72–98; and Sanabria, 'Consolidating States', p. 537.

⁹² Conaghan and Malloy, *Unsettling Statecraft*, pp. 186–7.

on coca for income and the drug trade accounted for up to 30 per cent of Bolivia's GDP.⁹³ It was also widely accepted that cocaine dollars had helped to stabilise national reserves during the country's mid-decade debt crisis, an 'unintended consequence' of neoliberal reforms that lifted capital controls in the banking sector.⁹⁴ In addition to this, Bolivia did not experience high levels of drug-related violence. Comparing Bolivia to Colombia, with its descent into violence, former Interior Minister Carlos Saavedra claimed: 'Here, drug trafficking was not violent. Here, there had been no bomb blasts or kidnappings of politicians, journalists or judges. Here, there had been practically no revenge killings by traffickers.'⁹⁵ These realities created a level of ambivalence towards the illicit economy. Former-president Jaime Paz Zamora stated, 'Dirty money, yes, but [money] that enters our country: [investment] that will die if we combat [the drug trade]'.⁹⁶ During negotiations over the Andean Initiative, therefore, the Bolivian government argued for policies that recognised these dynamics.

The Bolivian government claimed success in these negotiations, winning significant concessions. Paz Zamora took a similar approach to his predecessor, leveraging the drug issue for further economic support to mitigate and bolster the government's neoliberal reforms.⁹⁷ The APTA free-trade deal and more funding for alternative development aimed to reduce the national economy's dependence on coca. Bolivia would also receive US\$830 million in aid over the course of the planned five-year initiative, with a sizeable proportion allotted to Economic Support Funds (ESFs) (see Figure 1).⁹⁸ ESF funding would be used to compensate for the economic effects of curbing the drug trade, as well as for financing 'government payment of US and multilateral debt and US exports to the Bolivian private

⁹³ US OIG, *Report of Audit*, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Sewall Menzel, *Fire in the Andes: US Foreign Policy and Cocaine Politics in Bolivia and Peru* (Lanham, MD: University of Press of America, 1996), p. 11.

⁹⁵ Interview with Carlos Saavedra, interior minister (1991–3), 15 April 2014.

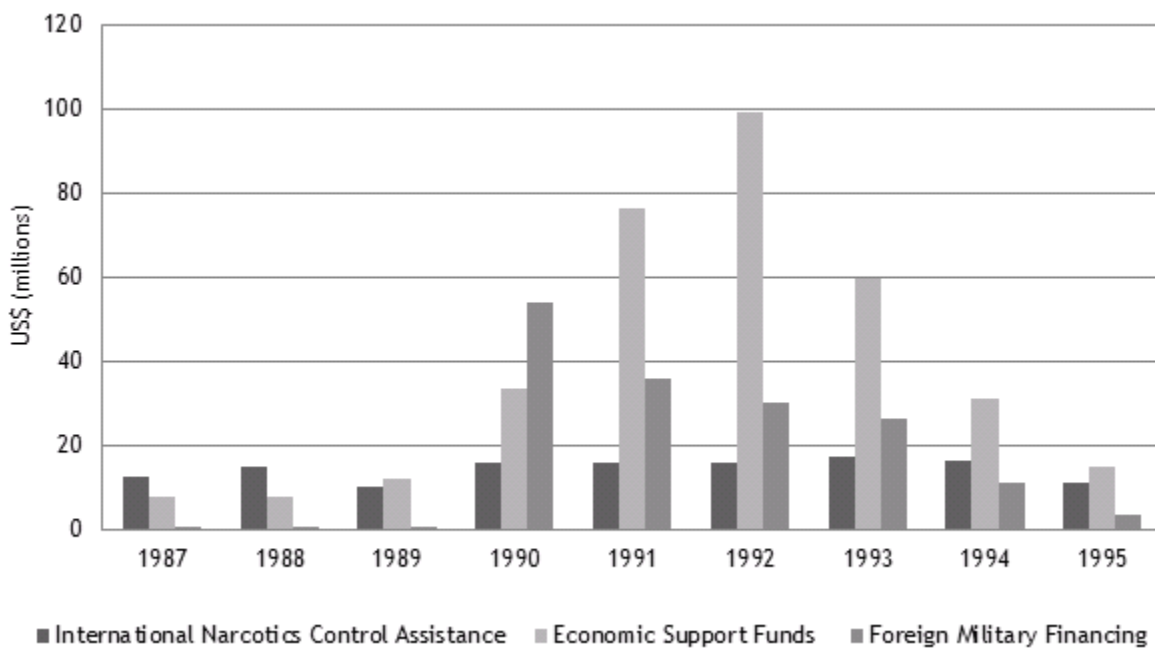
⁹⁶ Interview with Paz Zamora.

⁹⁷ Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States*, p. 199.

⁹⁸ ESFs are administered by the US State Department to provide funds to governments in areas of US strategic interest. They can be used for a variety of purposes. In this case, funding was used primarily to relieve external debt.

sector’.⁹⁹ Support was linked to counter-drug targets and back-loaded, i.e. designed to kick in as interdiction and eradication efforts took hold. ‘I more than achieved my objectives’, Paz Zamora argued. ‘I was going [to Washington] with the problem of opening the market and [easing] the external debt. We resolved it thanks to direct conversations with the President.’¹⁰⁰ As the policy was implemented, though, cracks began to appear: ‘Bush was a very good president, but the administration was bad.’¹⁰¹

Figure 1. *US Counter-Drug Related Assistance to Bolivia (1987–95)*



Source: US Agency for International Development (USAID), ‘U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)’, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/data/dataset/49c01560-6cd7-4bbc-bfef-7a1991867633>, last access 15 Feb. 2019.

Actors within the Bolivian government believed that enforcement-led policies had come to dominate the US approach. Indicating a gap between the policy as written and the policy as executed, one ADN senior minister argued that ‘the plan didn’t work, because we were never able to give the same intensity to the two dimensions [of the strategy]. The United

⁹⁹ Painter, *Bolivia and Coca*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

States each time pressured us more on the issue of repression [and] they didn't show anything tangible' on the development aspect of the Andean Initiative.¹⁰² For example, alternative development programmes were plagued by problems of design and funding, with the United States' development agency USAID refusing to engage local coca unions in the planning and implementation of projects.¹⁰³ The perception that the US embassy was more interested in waging a drug war than in advancing democracy and development linked into fears over the 'Colombianisation' of Bolivia.¹⁰⁴ Here, the militarised approach of the United States threatened to spark drug-related violence and economic crisis. Former Interior Minister Guillermo Capobianco stated that 'there was great pressure for counter-drug policies to be more indiscriminate; tougher, give more emphasis to repression, less emphasis to prevention or alternative development'.¹⁰⁵ Given local realities and ambivalence towards the coca-cocaine economy, the US approach was at times viewed as representing the greater threat to social, political and economic stability.¹⁰⁶ Such instability had potentially serious implications for Bolivia's still recent democratic transition of 1982. These concerns transcended drug war goals and underpinned resistance to US strategies of control.

The 'Democracy Generation', the Cold War Legacy and Yankee Imperialism

For Bolivia's 'democracy generation', protecting the political transition was advanced as an overriding priority. Paz Zamora's government had come to power in the second free and fair election of Bolivia's post-transition period. To prevent legislative deadlock, Paz Zamora's MIR formed a political pact with former dictator – and former persecutor of the MIR – Hugo Banzer¹⁰⁷ and his right-wing ADN party. While criticised by some for perpetuating Bolivia's patronage politics, this Acuerdo Patriótico (Patriotic Agreement)

¹⁰² Interview with senior minister of the Paz Zamora government, 7 May 2014. Several interview participants requested anonymity.

¹⁰³ For detailed analysis, see Painter, *Bolivia and Coca*, pp. 105–38.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Guillermo Capobianco, interior minister (1989–91), 16 April 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Concerns regarding political instability caused by challenging state–narco networks also formed part of this dynamic. See Gillies, 'Theorising State–Narco Relations'.

¹⁰⁷ Banzer's military dictatorship spanned the years 1971 to 1978.

was hailed as representing a new spirit of compromise and democracy. Paz Zamora described this dynamic by reference to the MIR's struggles under authoritarianism, and the party's commitment to preserving Bolivia's fledgling democracy.

<ext>I'm from what's called – what some in Bolivia call – the democracy generation. We were moved to consider the idea of a democratic Bolivia, because we were born in the Bolivia of the military *golpista* [...] This was our struggle. We were seven years in the underground resistance against the military, with all that entailed: exile, imprisonment.¹⁰⁸

These experiences had imbued actors such as Paz Zamora with a sense of mission. Forming an alliance with a former enemy demonstrated his commitment to ensuring 'democratic governability' and engendering a 'democratic culture' for the first time in Bolivia. Resistance to US drug war control was framed against this democratising narrative. Where US actors saw misguided denial of the 'drug problem' and narco-corruption, Bolivian actors declared their defence of the country's vital interests – specifically, sustaining a still fragile democratic transition. As fellow MIRista Guillermo Capobianco explained, 'The topic of drugs wasn't a priority for us. Transforming the country was. For the country to transition from the dictatorship of Banzer to democracy: this was our priority. Political stability, economic stability, these were our priorities.'¹⁰⁹

Ambassador Gelbard's abrasive style and the embassy's strategies of control, including the use of US economic power, bypassing of senior officials and pressuring to remove 'corrupt' actors created the sense that Bolivian sovereignty was being compromised. 'We had a strong-willed ambassador of a type ... how should I put it? A fanatic', stated Capobianco; 'the level of dependence on the United States [meant] that the suggestions of the ambassador were not really suggestions. They were orders. He was saying, "Right, [expletive], do this."'¹¹⁰ To actors such as Capobianco, animosity towards the United States stemmed not only from opposition to the drug war approach, but also from the MIR's leftist roots and the legacy of the Cold War.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Capobianco.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

While going on to adopt a broadly social democratic agenda, the MIR had radical beginnings in the student movement. This radicalism had included admiration for the Cuban Revolution and anti-US sentiment. Capobianco claimed that the party's history coloured relations with the US embassy. He believed that its victory had irritated the United States, and that its subsequent deal with Banzer had blind-sided the embassy. Discussing his ministerial responsibility for counter-drugs, Capobianco argued that 'There was distrust of our party due to the way we entered government [...] I got the poisoned chalice of combatting drugs [...] The American ambassador did not want me. He considered me a bloody lefty.'¹¹¹ Indicating that Capobianco's beliefs were not without some substance, Cason stated that the embassy had 'wrongly' viewed the MIR as an 'extremist far left party', and noted a 'tendency in those days, unfortunately, to stay away from the left, rather than to try to get to know them and influence their thinking'.¹¹²

From the perspective of MIRistas within the Bolivian government, this Cold War legacy had significant implications for the conduct of the US drug war in Bolivia. The 'war on drugs' may have replaced the Cold War as justification for US engagement in Bolivia, but the same tendencies remained. 'They faced [the "war on drugs"] with the Cold War mentality', Paz Zamora argued; 'it was the same personnel that had fought the Cold War. [They] didn't retire, they moved on to another enemy and they took the issue of the day, which was drug trafficking.'¹¹³ In support of US geopolitical Cold War goals, such personnel had backed authoritarian regimes, including the Banzer dictatorship, and had helped to suppress leftist actors, such as the MIR. Drawing on narratives of Yankee imperialism, Paz Zamora argued that similar US interference in Bolivian politics was evident during his government, although this time in service of the drug war and neoliberal goals. The post-Cold War US view was "'This planet is ours, including Bolivia.'" [The United States] was already involved in everything here.'¹¹⁴ According to this view, US embassy accusations of narco-corruption primarily served to eliminate legitimate opposition to US policy and advance the drug war strategy.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Oral history of James C. Cason, p. 65.

¹¹³ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Accusations of Narco-Corruption

The capture of Colonel Luis Arce Gómez exposed many of these tensions. Arce Gómez had backed the notorious ‘cocaine coup’ in which right-wing elements of the Bolivian military formed an alliance with the country’s drug traffickers to overthrow the democratically elected leftist coalition, the Unidad Democrática y Popular (Democratic and Popular Unity, UDP) and install the regime of General Luis García Meza (1980–1). Following its collapse Arce Gómez, the ‘Minister for Cocaine’ – as he had been dubbed by the US media¹¹⁵ – went on the run to escape prosecution for his complicity in human rights abuses and drug trafficking. In early 1989, the US embassy received intelligence that Arce Gómez was living openly in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz. Reportedly fearful of the consequences of bringing the former colonel’s case to a Bolivian court, Paz Zamora authorised the US embassy to lead the operation and secretly transport Arce Gómez for trial in the United States. Indicating Bolivian perceptions around the fragility of the transition, Gelbard claimed that Paz Zamora ‘still feared a military coup, even though the military was discredited’.¹¹⁶ The joint DEA-FELCN operation was completed in December 1989 and, despite the lack of a US–Bolivian extradition treaty, Arce Gómez was convicted in Miami of drug trafficking offences.

The operation and its fall-out deepened mistrust between the US embassy and the Bolivian government. Interior Minister Guillermo Capobianco had been completely bypassed in the operation. ‘We didn’t trust Capobianco’, explained Gelbard; ‘we didn’t tell Capobianco what we were doing because we were afraid he would blow it. He was from Santa Cruz, and we didn’t know what his connections might be with Arce Gómez.’¹¹⁷ Capobianco claimed that such exclusion was not unusual, as the United States frequently marginalised

¹¹⁵ In February 1981 the US TV programme ‘60 Minutes’ broadcast a TV special on the ‘Minister of Cocaine’. See also Cynthia Gorney, ‘Bolivia, Internationally Isolated [*sic*], Is again Rife with Coup Rumors’, *The Washington Post*, 22 March 1981, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/03/22/bolivia-internationally-isolated-is-again-rife-with-coup-rumors/e43489d1-e6d5-4a6a-a4f5-2aee5e0c24c8/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2abe204deb73, last accessed 15 Feb. 2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Gelbard.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

his office in the planning and execution of counter-drug operations. He stated that during ‘the most important operation of my time with respect to combating the mafias [the capture of Arce Gómez], I was at a barbeque [...] Nobody had told me.’¹¹⁸

Relations would reach their nadir shortly thereafter, though, following the appointment of Faustino Rico Toro to the head of the FELCN in February 1991. To many observers, Rico Toro’s appointment was baffling. The former colonel had been heavily implicated in drug trafficking and human rights abuses during Bolivia’s authoritarian period.¹¹⁹ In replacing trusted US drug war ally General Lucio Áñez, the Bolivian government came under immediate pressure. Paz Zamora defended the decision as an attempt to reaffirm Bolivian sovereignty over counter-drug operations.

<ext>[Áñez] was suffering from heart problems. It was bad. Not only could he not work, [but] his character was failing; he was fading. The DEA and the entire American administration were abusing this, and they acted as they liked. So, I said, ‘Right, we’re going to put in a Bolivian military man from days gone by; a military man with nerve.’ And Rico Toro was there, who was this type of guy, and he hadn’t been involved in drug trafficking. But he was from that era, this phase of Bolivian military [government], and he carried out certain functions. He was the President of the Corporación del Desarrollo [Development Corporation] de Cochabamba, and he was a member of General Banzer’s party, who was our ally, so I put him in. I didn’t know him well, but I put him in because he was a man – tough – and the Americans wouldn’t be able to do whatever they wanted with him. This was the problem; as simple as that.¹²⁰

From this perspective, Paz Zamora had reasserted Bolivian control, inhibiting the US drug war proxy model. Gonzalo Torrico, an ADN government minister, stated that ‘Capobianco told [the United States] that this is a sovereign country; that the government can name whomever it sees fit.’¹²¹ The embassy, though, saw it as a cynical attempt to slow

¹¹⁸ Interview with Capobianco.

¹¹⁹ For example: James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–1982* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 156.

¹²⁰ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹²¹ Interview with Torrico.

down progress in the fight against the coca-cocaine trade and to protect narco-allies: ‘We were engaged in trying to train highly capable Bolivian units; [...] hard to do, because people would get transferred [...] The government didn’t want people to be *too* capable.’¹²²

Despite Rico Toro’s strong connection to US ally ADN, the embassy held Paz Zamora and the MIRistas responsible for the appointment.¹²³ Indeed, Ambassador Gelbard lobbied ADN members of the government – reportedly aghast at the news – for Rico Toro’s removal: ‘I went to see General Banzer, and I said, “This is just beyond the pale, unacceptable. This will destroy the relationship. I have frozen all your aid. I will get others to do so too.”’¹²⁴ This show of US economic and geopolitical power ensured that the decision to appoint Rico Toro was quickly reversed. Sensing blood, the embassy then went after other ‘corrupt’ officials. The embassy claimed that Paz Zamora’s government had received ‘drug trafficker money for their election campaign’; that ‘Guillermo Capobianco was the bag man for all this’, and that he was aided by ‘the man who became National Police Chief [Felipe Carvajal]’.¹²⁵ Using the Rico Toro case as leverage, the embassy secured the resignations of both men.

I called the President and I told him [that] I really needed to talk to him about further corruption problems. He invited me over to his house, we sat down and went through a bottle and a half of Scotch whisky. I remember – my wife remembers – I stumbled home, and I fell into bed saying, ‘God, what I do for my country!’ He agreed to get rid of them.¹²⁶

Leveraging Political Opponents?

The exercise of US control was thus backed by the regional hegemon’s power, used to maintain its drug war proxies and remove supposedly corrupt officials. For Capobianco, though, the US embassy’s efforts to remove him stemmed not from corruption, but from his

¹²² Interview with Gelbard.

¹²³ Clare Hargreaves, *Snowfields: The War on Cocaine in the Andes* (London: Zed Books, 1992), pp. 164–6.

¹²⁴ Interview with Gelbard.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

leftist background and outspoken criticism of the United States. Aside from his radical leftist roots, he had publicly criticised the US embassy for its failure to provide adequate weaponry to the anti-narcotics police. On a visit to UMOPAR's base in the Chapare, and in the presence of the media and DEA officials, Capobianco 'said strongly, in raised voice, "I'm giving the Ambassador a 72-hour deadline to change these arms and put in place modern, functioning arms."'”¹²⁷ Capobianco claimed the US embassy never forgave him for his actions, which challenged the United States and its commitment to counter-drug efforts. According to this narrative, US drug war control was used to leverage the removal of a politician perceived as hostile to the United States.

Indeed, Paz Zamora argued that the 'war on drugs' was widely applied against him and the MIR. Prior to his presidency, Paz Zamora had come under scrutiny after pictures emerged of him meeting with known drug trafficker and former army captain Isaac 'Oso' Chavarría. Allegations of narco-links re-emerged following the end of his term, as Chavarría was captured in January 1994 and began to disclose the supposed details of his relationship with the MIR. A congressional investigation resulted in the arrest and prosecution of Oscar Eid – a prominent MIRista – for his role in accepting campaign contributions from Chavarría. Paz Zamora accepted that Chavarría was friendly with the MIR and that he had provided 'in-kind' support to election campaigns, but asserted that no money had changed hands.¹²⁸ Meetings between the MIR and Chavarría were dismissed as 'an error, but not a crime'.¹²⁹ The US embassy contradicted this, stating 'that Paz Zamora and others in his political party had received funds' from the drug trafficker, accusing the now-former president 'of providing cover for Chavarría during his tenure'.¹³⁰ As a result, Paz Zamora's US visa was revoked in 1996, alongside those of several other MIR members.

For Paz Zamora, the episode demonstrated attempts by the United States, in conjunction with its Bolivian political allies, to sabotage his political career. He argued that most

¹²⁷ Interview with Capobianco.

¹²⁸ The death of Chavarría as he awaited trial in 1995 left many questions unanswered.

¹²⁹ Roberto Laserna, *20 (Mis)Conceptions on Coca and Cocaine* (La Paz: Clave, 1997), p. 190.

¹³⁰ Eduardo Gamarra, 'Transnational Criminal Organisations in Bolivia', in Tom J. Farer (ed.), *Transnational Crime in the Americas: An Inter-American Dialogue Book* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 195.

military officers of the García Meza period had links to the drug trade. While Chavarría was no different in this regard, Paz Zamora claimed that he had left these links behind by the time he expressed support for the party. ‘The other parties saw that this type of guy had approached us, and they all used it politically against me’, claimed Paz Zamora, ‘and later, the American embassy used it, but [only] when I had left the presidency’.¹³¹ Accusations of corruption were thus used as a political weapon against Paz Zamora and the MIR: ‘We were the youngest party, the new boys [...] If anyone had problems with drug trafficking, it was the old parties: the MNR, ADN.’ The goal of the United States in all of this was clear to Paz Zamora: ‘To sanction a president who had rebelled against certain things and to give a message to the political world: be careful! [...] I confronted the Americans on the way they wanted to act in counter-drugs and also on their neoliberal policies. [I tried to] address the abuses and the militarisation, the violence. I didn’t want violence to arrive here.’¹³² In this view, the United States aimed to discredit Paz Zamora and his record, ensuring more favourable conditions for the neoliberal agenda of his ‘US-backed’ successor Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (MNR). ‘They were sure that I was going to return after Sánchez de Lozada and reverse [his programme of privatisation]’, Paz Zamora argued; ‘these were the typical psychological warfare operations that came from Cold War working methods [...] The “war on drugs”, like the Cold War, was used to justify everything.’¹³³

The idea that the United States had used supposed drug links to target political enemies had a long history in Bolivia. It was argued that the United States held back evidence of drug links until opportune moments. This tactic would be used to maintain control over troublesome actors, protect allies or eliminate rivals. For example, in 1961 prominent leftist and labour leader Juan Lechín temporarily withdrew from politics following accusations of drug corruption by the US embassy and Bolivia’s right-wing press.¹³⁴ Furthermore, Hugo Rodas Morales argues that former allies of García Meza were targeted for their involvement in the drug trade post-1982, while Banzer-aligned officers and politicians were

¹³¹ Interview with Paz Zamora.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 282–4.

kept in play.¹³⁵ The reason: Banzer and the ADN continued to be useful assets for the United States. The threat of scandal, it was argued, forced ‘the major political parties into a constant state of alert, [keeping] Bolivian policy in line with US demands [...] Those Bolivian collaborators closest to the US embassy generally [had] skeletons in their own closets.’¹³⁶ In this view, corruption allegations formed part of the US agenda of control in Bolivia: the instrumentalisation of the ‘war on drugs’ followed in the historic lineage of US Cold War tactics.

The Repentance Decree

Demonstrating the fluidity of power relations, though, the Paz Zamora government introduced the Decreto de Arrepentimiento (Repentance Decree) in July 1991. This Bolivian-led initiative offered reduced sentences for drug traffickers who turned themselves in and cooperated with the authorities. In contrast to the US securitised approach, it sought a negotiated settlement with organised crime. Different conceptualisations of Bolivia’s ‘drug problem’ once more came to the fore, as the government applied a policy aligned with Bolivian priorities.

The US embassy argued that Bolivia’s presence in the global drug trade had increased over the course of Paz Zamora’s administration. Whereas previously Bolivian coca paste had been exported to Colombia for final processing, Gelbard claimed that local traffickers had shifted to producing and transporting cocaine via their own, more lucrative, routes.¹³⁷ ‘The Americans wanted to sustain the theory that Bolivia was already a producer of cocaine, a world producer of cocaine’, Paz Zamora argued; ‘I never accepted this; I rejected it.’¹³⁸ US officials were adamant, though, that ‘Bolivia had become the second-largest cocaine

¹³⁵ Hugo Rodas Morales, *Huanchaca: Modelo político empresarial de la cocaína en Bolivia* (La Paz: Plural Editores, 1996), p. 128.

¹³⁶ Theo Roncken, ‘Bolivia: Impunity and the Control of Corruption in the Fight against Drugs’, in Transnational Institute (TNI), *Democracy, Human Rights, and Militarism in The War on Drugs in Latin America* (Cochabamba: TNI, CEDIB and Infopress Centroamericana, 1997), p. 50.

¹³⁷ Interview with Gelbard.

¹³⁸ Interview with Paz Zamora.

producer after Colombia', processing one-third of Bolivian coca-paste into cocaine within the country by 1990.¹³⁹ Notoriously problematic statistics on the illicit economy¹⁴⁰ were used to counter the Bolivian narrative that the country's role in the drug trade was limited to humble coca cultivation. The US embassy painted a picture of increasingly influential native criminal organisations posing a threat to Bolivian society and politics. As such, the embassy argued that the development-led approach favoured by Paz Zamora was insufficient to deal with the 'security threat' of Bolivia's coca-cocaine economy. Aligning with this narrative, the US embassy planned a large DEA-UMOPAR operation in June 1991: a raid designed to secure state authority in 'Bolivia's Medellín', Santa Ana de Yacuma (Beni department). The aftermath of the operation would open space for the Bolivian government to push for a different approach.

Although the US embassy claimed the operation had significantly disrupted the drug trade and re-established 'Bolivian sovereignty over Santa Ana', no major traffickers were arrested.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the raid became a major source of US–Bolivian discord. In the midst of the operation, the local navy garrison commander was detained and accused of collusion with drug traffickers.¹⁴² Military officers rallied against the actions of the DEA and UMOPAR, claiming that the commander had been assaulted, and that the United States had exceeded its authority.¹⁴³ Gelbard's robust public defence of the operation and further accusations of high-level corruption in the Bolivian military stirred more anti-US sentiment,¹⁴⁴ while reports of heavy-handedness and police brutality added to the public

¹³⁹ Painter, *Bolivia and Coca*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁰ For example: Francisco E. Thoumi, 'The Numbers Game: Let's All Guess the Size of the Illegal Drug Industry!', *The Journal of Drug Issues*, 35: 1 (2005), pp. 185–200.

¹⁴¹ Gamarra, 'US–Bolivian Counternarcotics', p. 233.

¹⁴² US Congress, *Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap – Is It Working?* Thirteenth Report, House Committee on Government Operations (Aug. 1990) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), p. 57.

¹⁴³ James Painter, 'Bolivian Military Leader Questions DEA's Role in Drug Bust Gone Awry', *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 July 1991, available at <https://www.csmonitor.com/1991/0712/12062.html>, last access 12 Feb. 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Menzel, *Fire in the Andes*, p. 56.

backlash.¹⁴⁵ Interior Minister (1991–3) Carlos Saavedra claimed that ‘The city had been very angry about the intervention. The army had arrived, the police [and] planes, so the population was afraid: kids, people sought refuge in the churches. [It was] like a film.’¹⁴⁶ The incident seemed to confirm Bolivian fears over the ‘Colombianisation’ of the country, and the view that US counter-drug operations risked Bolivia’s stability.

Believing that they had been marginalised in the execution of the Santa Ana operation, the Bolivian government sought to capitalise on the negative spin around the episode and reassert control. The government introduced new limits on DEA operations¹⁴⁷ and, more significantly, the Repentance Decree. Saavedra described the aftermath of the operation as an opportunity to take a different approach, claiming that the residents of Santa Ana and drug traffickers themselves wished to cooperate with the government.

<ext>A Mrs Roca delivered a letter to me [while I was still in Santa Ana], in which she explained that her husband wanted to turn himself in. I took the letter away, I read it, and it said that her children couldn’t study in foreign schools because the American and Europeans knew about their life and they blocked their studies. And that they didn’t have a social life; they lived in hiding and the family were outcasts, because of the husband.¹⁴⁸

Just over a month after the raid, the Repentance Decree was passed. In contrast to a similar measure in Colombia, Saavedra argued that it was a success: ‘This was the best road for the counter-drug fight in Bolivia. Why? Because there was no violence.’¹⁴⁹

The decree halted work towards the introduction of a new US–Bolivian extradition treaty, a major goal of the US embassy.¹⁵⁰ The embassy also viewed it as allowing traffickers ‘off

¹⁴⁵ Coletta Youngers, ‘A Fundamentally Flawed Strategy: The US “War” on Drugs in Bolivia’, WOLA Issue Brief 4, 18 Sept. 1991, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Saavedra.

¹⁴⁷ Williams, ‘Waging the War on Drugs’, p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Saavedra.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Menzel, *Fire in the Andes*, p. 65.

the hook'. Where the United States had successfully imposed its will in other areas of drug policy, here the Bolivian government asserted its own vision. Adding to tensions, Paz Zamora pushed through the decree while Ambassador Gelbard was out of the country.¹⁵¹ According to Saavedra, 'When [Gelbard] saw the decree he threw out a cry to the heavens, got angry and said we should never have made the decree without consulting with them, [...] saying that the United States was not going to permit it.'¹⁵²

The surrender of seven of Bolivia's top ten traffickers less than six months after the introduction of the decree was held as vindication of this stance. Some argued, though, that heightened US-led militarised counter-drug efforts and the possible threat of extradition underpinned the willingness of the traffickers to turn themselves in. Other critics claimed that reduced sentencing and the prospect of continuing to direct business from prison was too good an opportunity for the traffickers to turn down.¹⁵³ It was clear that the 'repentant ones' had agreed collectively to hand themselves over to the authorities. There were doubts over the veracity of their testimonies, including statements accounting for their drug wealth.¹⁵⁴ Regardless of these criticisms, the decree was hailed as a success by the Bolivian government, representing an alternative approach to that of the United States to the problem of drug trafficking. The decree placed local Bolivian priorities ahead of drug war goals.

Conclusion

In summary, the implementation of the Andean Initiative in Bolivia demonstrates the contested nature of US counter-drug policy at the country level. US actors were largely informed by the language and logic of securitisation. The perceived security threat posed by the coca-cocaine economy was used to justify US counter-drug efforts in Bolivia. US strategies of control included bypassing 'uncooperative' elements of the Bolivian

¹⁵¹ According to Saavedra (interview), Gelbard's wife broke her leg during a family skiing trip to Chile, delaying the ambassador's return to Bolivia.

¹⁵² Interview with Saavedra.

¹⁵³ Painter, *Bolivia and Coca*, pp. 83–4.

¹⁵⁴ Gerardo Irusta Medrano, *Narcotráfico: Hablan los arrepentidos: Personajes y hechos reales* (La Paz: Gerardo Irusta Medrano, 1992), p. 83.

government and pressuring for the removal of ‘drug-tainted’ officials. These practices were held as complementary to stated US goals of forwarding free-market, liberal democracies throughout the region. By contrast, the drug trade was generally not conceptualised as a national security threat within the Bolivian government, given its relatively peaceful nature and importance to the national economy. Militarised US counter-drug policies were instead seen as posing a threat to social, political and economic stability. Bolivian interlocutors spoke of the drug war’s place within the broader function of US foreign policy in Bolivia. The US embassy’s use of leverage over the Bolivian government, for example, represented the continuation of Cold War-era ‘imperialist’ politics and tactics: voices critical of US policy were targets of drug corruption allegations. For the self-proclaimed ‘democracy generation’, the preservation of the country’s still fragile transition was prioritised over the ‘war on drugs’. This goal led to resistance to securitised US drug war policies, as the Bolivian government attempted to navigate domestic imperatives and external US drug war demands.

Accounting for ‘on-the-ground’ dynamics and the ‘messiness’ of counter-drug policy implementation, the article thus advances a more nuanced understanding of drug war power relations than more simplistic US-centric analyses. The exercise of US geopolitical and economic power was evident in the export of the Andean Initiative to Bolivia, while narratives of the drug war shaped the perspectives of key US and Bolivian actors of the period. However, the article also demonstrates the need to move beyond these top-down approaches, widening analysis beyond narrow ‘drug fetishism’. The issue of counter-drug policy was absorbed into the distinct agendas of multiple actors, with historical forces, such as the legacy of the Cold War, weighing on interactions between them. Different narratives wove these agendas together: domestic imperatives of the drug war ‘justified’ US actions in Bolivia, and consolidation of democratic transition ‘justified’ resistance to US securitisation. This contextualised analytical approach reveals the instrumentalisation of the ‘war on drugs’ in US–Bolivian relations of power and control. Such insights deepen our understanding of how the US drug war has unfolded in Latin America.

Bolivia has since cut a new path in its approach to the coca-cocaine economy, although many similar dynamics from the Andean Initiative period may be identified. Evo Morales – a prominent coca union leader at that time – rose to the presidency in 2006, in part propelled by his strong opposition to US influence in Bolivia. Bolstered by fellow ‘pink tide’ governments in the region and booming international prices for Bolivian commodities, Morales resisted US control. The Bolivian government severed counter-drug cooperation

with the United States, expelling Ambassador Philip Goldberg in September 2008, then the DEA in January 2009. Morales accused the United States of meddling in the internal affairs of the country, drawing on familiar themes of Yankee imperialism. The US response has also followed a similar path. The US government has decertified Bolivia on multiple occasions for ‘failing’ to fulfil its drug control obligations, while accusing Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) party of narco-corruption.¹⁵⁵ Despite this, Bolivia continues to reject securitised drug war policies, again reflecting the view that these lie contrary to local priorities. The Morales government’s policy of ‘social control’, for example, seeks a collaborative approach with coca-growing communities in limiting cultivation and fostering sustainable development.¹⁵⁶ It represents a distinctly Bolivian solution to the coca-cocaine economy. Once again, diverging drug war narratives are used by US and Bolivian actors to project particular agendas. However, where officials of the Paz Zamora government had sought to keep the United States on side while pursuing distinct Bolivian aims, Morales’ repudiation of US influence has been clear and decisive. The issue of drug control remains embedded in US–Bolivian power relations.

Annex A: Interview Participants

Interviewee	Biography	Date and location
Bolivian official A (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	Minister during the Paz Zamora government	7 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Bolivian official B (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	Minister during the Paz Zamora government	8 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Bolivian official C	Government official during the	8 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia

¹⁵⁵ For example: Ryan Grim and Nick Wing, ‘Operation Naked King: U.S. Secretly Targeted Bolivia’s Evo Morales in Drug Sting’, *Huffington Post*, 15 Sept. 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/operation-naked-king-evo-morales_us_55f70da2e4b077ca094fdbel?guccounter=1, last access 17 Jan. 2019.

¹⁵⁶ See Thomas Grisaffi *et al.*, ‘Bolivia’s Integrated Development with Coca: Shifting the Focus from Eradication to Poverty Alleviation’, *Bulletin on Narcotics*, 61: 1 (2017), pp. 131–57.

<i>(requested anonymity)</i>	Paz Zamora government	
Bolivian official D <i>(requested anonymity)</i>	Police official during the Paz Zamora government	9 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Bowers, Charles R.	US ambassador to Bolivia 1991–4	12 April 2013, Nashville, TN
Burke, Terry	Deputy administrator and acting administrator of the DEA (1989–91)	23 April 2013, Washington, DC
Caballero, Luis	UMOPAR commander, 1990–6; subsequently head of the FELCN in the early 2000s	5 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Capobianco, Guillermo	Bolivian interior minister, 1989–91	16 April 2014, Santa Cruz, Bolivia
Carnevale, John	ONDCP official, 1988–2002	26 April 2013, Washington, DC
Céspedes, Jaime	Commander of the Bolivian national police, 1990–2	3 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Coomer, Mark	Southcom official, 1985–96, and ONDCP, 1995–2009	8 May 2013, Washington, DC (phone interview)
Gelbard, Robert	Ambassador to Bolivia 1988–91 and assistant secretary of state of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) 1993–7	13 May 2013, Washington, DC
Greenlee, David	Deputy chief of mission to the US embassy in La Paz, 1987–9, and US ambassador to Bolivia, 2002–6	26 April 2013, Washington, DC
Kamman, Curtis	US ambassador to Bolivia, 1994–7	2 May 2013, Chicago, IL (phone interview)
Levitsky, Melvyn	Assistant secretary of state of International Narcotics Matters (INM), 1988–92, and current	7 May 2013, Ann Arbor, MI (phone interview)

	board member of the UN's International Narcotics Control Board	
Lupo, Javier	Secretary of the Consejo Nacional de Lucha contra el Tráfico Ilícito de Drogas (National Council for the Fight against Trafficking in Illegal Drugs, CONALTID), 1990–1	9 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia
Miller, David	National Security Council deputy assistant secretary, 1988–92	3 May 2013, Washington, DC
Paz Zamora, Jaime	President of Bolivia, 1989–93	26 April 2014, Tarija, Bolivia
Reinike, Godofredo	Human rights ombudsman for the Chapare, 1997–2002	18 April 2014, Cochabamba, Bolivia
Saavedra, Carlos	Bolivian interior minister, 1991–3	15 April 2014, Santa Cruz, Bolivia
Salinas, José	Bolivian under-secretary for alternative development, 1990–3	23 April 2014, Cochabamba, Bolivia
US official – A (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	ONDCP official	6 May 2013, Washington, DC
US official – B (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	ONDCP official	7 May 2013, Washington, DC
US official – C (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	State Department official	8 May 2013, Washington, DC
US official – D (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	State Department official	8 May 2013, Washington, DC
US official – E (<i>requested anonymity</i>)	State Department official	8 May 2013, Washington, DC
Torrico, Gonzalo	Bolivian vice-minister of social	2 May 2014, La Paz, Bolivia

Spanish abstract

La implementación de la Iniciativa Andina de 1989 dio como resultado agendas en competencia entre los EEUU y Bolivia. Mientras que funcionarios de la embajada norteamericana buscaron ejercer control en busca de políticas militarizadas, la ambivalencia del gobierno boliviano alrededor de la economía de la coca-cocaína apuntaló la oposición a la ‘colombianización’ del país. Este artículo deconstruye los análisis de arriba-abajo y desde el punto de vista estadounidense de la guerra contra las drogas en América Latina para examinar cómo el poder norteamericano fue ejercido y resistido en el poco estudiado caso boliviano. Avanzando un entendimiento del desarrollo de la guerra norteamericana contra las drogas en América Latina apoyado en la historia, el artículo revela la fluidez de las relaciones de poder EEUU-Bolivia, la naturaleza contestada de la política contra las drogas a nivel de país, y la instrumentalización de la ‘guerra contra las drogas’ sobre agendas dispares de EEUU y Bolivia.

Spanish keywords: la ‘Guerra contra las Drogas’, economía de drogas ilícitas, coca, el papel de los EEUU en Latinoamérica, relaciones de poder norte–sur

Portuguese abstract

A implementação da Iniciativa Andina de 1989 trouxe à tona as conflitantes agendas dos EUA e da Bolívia. Enquanto funcionários da embaixada dos EUA procuraram exercer controle na busca de políticas de militarização, a ambivalência do governo da Bolívia no que dizia respeito à economia gerada pela cocaína fundamentava oposição à ‘Colombianização’ do país. Este artigo desconstrói análises ‘do topo para a base’, predominantemente centradas nos Estados Unidos sobre a guerra contra as drogas na América Latina e procura examinar como o poder dos Estados Unidos era exercido e resistido como no caso, pouco estudado, da Bolívia. Propondo um entendimento um pouco mais fundamentado historicamente sobre desenvolvimento da guerra contra as drogas dos Estados Unidos na América Latina, o artigo revela a fluidez das relações de poder entre os Estados Unidos e a Bolívia, a natureza combatida da política de combate às drogas em nível nacional, e a instrumentalização da ‘guerra contra as drogas’ nas distintas agendas da Bolívia e dos Estados Unidos.

Portuguese keywords: a ‘Guerra contra as Drogas’, economia ilícita de drogas, cocaína, o papel dos Estados Unidos na América do Sul, relações de poder entre o Sul e o Norte